

Transcription Date: 09/16/09 – Transcriber: JJ

[BEGIN AUDIO]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The following oral history interview was conducted November 8, 1992 at Midway Island. Approximately 11:15 a.m.

The subject was Mr. Bill Lucius. The interviewer was Mr. Daniel Martinez, Historian for the National Park Service. This oral history project is a cooperative effort of the United States Navy, [PH] ComNav Base, Pearl Harbor, [PH] Barber's Point Naval Air Station, the state of Hawaii, Historic Preservation Division, and the National Park Service.

Can you state for me your full name?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: William R. Lucius.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And your retired rank?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Colonel, United States Marine Corps. Retired.

DANIEL MARTINEZ:

[SILENCE]

Sure.

He's the man! Could you please state your full name, please?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: William R. Lucius.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And your retired rank?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Colonel, United States Marine Corps. Retired.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Your age, Sir?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: 78.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Your current address?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: 201 Prune Tree Drive, Healdsburg, California, 95448.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Where were you born, Bill?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I was born in a little town in Southern Illinois, known as Mascoutah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And what date of birth?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: “One May,” 1914.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Okay.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I was lieutenant colonel at the time and I was given it for my decorations.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Okay.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Don’t wanna assume under false pretenses.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [LAUGHS] All right, we’re gonna start over. Please state for me your full name?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Whatever you say, Dan. William R. Lucius, Colonel, United States Marine Corps. Retired.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And your age, Sir?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: 78.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: And your present address?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: 201 Prune Tree Drive, Healdsburg, California, 95448.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When were you born, Bill?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: “One May,” 1914.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Place of birth?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Mascoutah, Illinois.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How many in your family?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: My brother and my sister, and father and mother. Myself.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Besides your self, did any of them serve in World War II?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: My brother served in World War II.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What branch of service?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Marine Corps.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Where’d you go to high school?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I went to high school in Riverside, California.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How did you make it from Mascoutah to Riverside? What happened?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I was a very young boy when my father had some ailments. He had a brother living in Riverside at the time. We moved from Illinois when I was about 8 years old to Riverside, California.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Upon graduating from high school, what did you do?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I already knew I was going into the Marine Corps. I graduated from high school about the 12th or 13th of June 1932 and I'd already been accepted into the Marine Corps.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you try any other branch of service before selecting the Marine Corps?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yes I was very much interested in air corps. I tried to get in there and had some great help but I didn't make it. They weren't accepting anybody at that time.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I understand you had to perform a special service to get into the Marine Corps. Can you tell me about that?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I went from school down to Los Angeles and when I got down there, I talked to the air force and air corps and army recruiter and navy recruiter, though I wasn't interested in the navy. And none of them had any vacancies.

I walked down the street to what's Main Street now in Los Angeles, and there was a marine standing in the corner there. I asked him if they had any vacancies and he said, "Yes, we've got 10 for the month for the west coast."

I was very interested, and said I was, and he said, "Are you a high school graduate," and I said, "Yes."

He was very much enthused, because in those days there were very few graduates in the marine corps.

So, I went up and was examined physically and the doctor said well he was sorry he couldn't take me because of the fact I was 2 pounds under weight. I weighted 118 pounds. So I guess I had a tear come in my eye at that point, so he said, "Have you got any money?" I said, "Yes I've got 50 cents." He said, "Well, go out and buy some bananas."

Actually, the bananas were two or three cents a pound, so I bought about four pounds and came back and weighted 124 pounds, so the marine corps accepted me.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Where did they send you upon your enlistment?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I came from Riverside down to Los Angeles, and then went by train to San Diego to the marine corps recruit depot there.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was the experience of entering the Marine Corps recruitment depot?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, it was an entirely different day than today, and actually we were just given.... We weren't escorted down there at all. We were just given some tokens, and the trolley line ran out by the base.

We finally got down there about ten o'clock at night. And it was on the first day of July. And they said, "You're not going to do anything."

So we sat around the barracks until after the fourth of July holiday. Then we came under training. Most of the trainers in those days were World War I guys, and very difficult and very tough.

Then about the end of July....Back in antiquity, the Japanese had moved into China. So the marines were going to reinforce the 4th regiment of the marine corps there.

So we were all put on the transport Henderson and proceeded to Shanghai, China.

And it took a month and a half to get there in those days.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So would it be safe to say that you didn't complete all your training in San Diego, you actually completed most of it, a lot of it....

WILLIAM LUCIUS: [OVERLAPPING] Didn't even complete my rifle training in San Diego.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You did that in China?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: In China.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did your drill instructor leave you with a certain impression of the Marine Corps?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Can I do an aside?

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Sure.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I always remember Sergeant Palmer was the drill instructor. And he had another gentleman by the name of [PH] Coffinburg. The other one I can't remember. My interest in the marine corps became predominant at that time because just as we were leaving for China, they came up.

And the guy said, "Poor old Sergeant Palmer's mother has died. It's a terrible situation and he hasn't got any money to get home."

We each gave him a dollar, and there was about 30, 35 in the platoon. And so we they gave a dollar a piece. That evening, I noticed Sergeant Palmer and [PH] Coffinburg and the rest were dividing the money up between them.

And I'm sure that the mother never had any problems whatsoever! [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [LAUGHS] When you went to China, that's quite an experience. What was that like for you?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: It was very... I joined the second battalion, fourth regiment of the marines, probably the finest fighting organization the world ever knew. And spit and polished, I went to G Company and the commanding officer was a Russian. The first sergeant was a fellow by the name of [PH] Zumaskoski, he was Polish.

And the then...which were eight man squads. I was the only person that was not of World War vintage in that squad. See, the corps was a different day. Then the first sergeant found out I type. Quite unusual in those days for boys to be able to type because in most of the classes in the high school, ladies were learning to type. So I became the company clerk.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How did you learn to type?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: In high school.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: In high school.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Typing in high school.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How old were you when you joined the Marine Corps?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: 17.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Quite an experience for a 17 year old.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yes it was! [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can you summarize your career up until the outbreak of World War II?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yes, I think it was a very interesting career. I loved China. I realized that it was important to become a rifle shot and I became the Asiatic champion as a very young boy in China.

I actually fired with the army at [PH] Tingsh Singh and was a representative of the rifle team there. I also spent a year aboard ship in the China station. Very delightful there.

Actually, you were supposed to do 30 months in china in those days and I kept extending, because I liked it that much. And finally my mother, who was a very dogmatic individual, wrote the secretary of the navy and said she couldn't understand how a fine Catholic boy could be out in those dens of iniquity for all that time.

So Josephus Daniels was the Secretary of the Navy at the time, and he wrote back and said he couldn't understand it either, but I was coming back on the next ship, which I did.

I came back on the Henderson again and returned to the west coast to spend about a month with my parents.

And then I traveled across country and I'd already been assigned to the ordinance school in Philadelphia and went there as a trainee to become an [PH] "Arm-er," was the title, as a young private in Philadelphia. And I spent about six months at Philadelphia in school at 11 South Broad Street.

Then I was transferred out to Great Lakes, and I became sort of the supply guy there. It was a small barracks in the naval training station, marine barracks, with 60 individuals.

And I spent about a year there. And then I was selected because of my ability as an inspector-instructor for the 9th reserve battalion in Chicago, which was all reserves. And they had one regular marine officer.

I was a sergeant by then, and the first sergeant and myself we were known as the inspector-instructors. And I spent over three and a half years in Chicago. When the battalion was called back to duty in 1940, I was transferred with the battalion to the marine corps base at San Diego.

I was there with the second defense battalion, which some of them here were part of. I stayed there about two months and because of my knowledge in supply. Ewa... aviation was coming out at that time, the second marine air group.

So I was transferred to North Island and subsequently came out on the Enterprise with the second marine air group and wound up at Ewa.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Now, you had initially joined the Marine Corps to be in aviation. How many years did it take to get there?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Just about ten.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [LAUGHS]

WILLIAM LUCIUS: And I had no desire to be a flyer. I never had any desire of that. And Midway made that more determined than ever that I didn't want to be a flyer.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Well, you arrived in Hawaii and were now stationed at Ewa Marine Corps Air Station yourself. What was Ewa Marine Corps station?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, Ewa Marine Corps station, you're very familiar with it Danny, but it was originally built as a mooring mast for the [PH] Shenandoah, the [PH] Akron and the [PH] Makon, which were huge dirigibles.

And the intent being that they would come up and tie out there. And it was rather a large expanse, very coral. And a lot of bushes over it. It was right next to the sugar plantation and it was manned by one chief. And I think he had another assistant.

He lived on quarters right on the base, which was rather a large setup. And we came out there and took it over at that time, and tents were put up.

And the runways were laid down, and some of the storage buildings that had been used by the navy were taken over, and the chief was removed from his quarters.

That became the headquarters of the second marine air group, which is what it was known as then.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How many airplanes were brought out there?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Oh, I can't remember that vividly. We had several large troops... we had the four squadrons of course, which is obviously what it was composed of.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Do you remember some of the types of aircraft?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I remember particularly the ones that were flown to Midway because those were the old two-seater bombers that were still with fabric on them. They had the canvas fabric stretched across them.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Vindicators, I think they were called?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Pardon?

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Vindicator Aircraft, or...?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, they.... I've got all the dope on it. Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Okay. What was your job at Ewa?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I joined the supply department, or the quarter mastery. We never heard of the supply in those days. And a major was in charge of the operation. I was given the job in charge of the clothing stores. And being as clothing was highly pilferable, they used the old storage area right under the mooring mast for the clothing. And that was my job at that time.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can you describe to me the events of December 7, 1941?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Very vividly, because to go back in retrospect, I had brought my wife out to the islands because we were on expeditionary duty. And of course, wives were not paid for. So I paid my wife's way out to Honolulu, and I'd made friends with the manager of the store at the plantation there, a guy by the name of [PH] John P. Bento.

And so I was able to rent from him his summer cottage, which was right near what was then known as the old [PH] Scoffield Circle.

One road went to Ewa Beach, one went to [PH] Pahoia, the other one came from Hawaii. And right within maybe 500 or 1,000 yards, there was an area he had turned around and owned, which was about maybe an acre and a half. And he had a water tower in this.

And in the bottom of the water tower was a kitchen and a bath. And upstairs was a bedroom, and on top of that was a water tower. And we were going to have some of the guys out for a picnic on that Sunday, my wife and I, that we'd known.

And so we slept in, and about eight o'clock I got up.

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A little before eight, and walked out on this precipice around the water tower where you could see the Skipper, the Pan-American boat. I hollered at my wife and said, “My God! They were on maneuvers, somebody’s just run into one of the mooring masts at Ford Island.”

‘Cause we could see Ford Island very vividly. My wife said “Oh my God!”

I looked and then I realized they were Japanese planes, ‘cause I had a pair of field glasses and was able to look right away. I immediately took her, we had an automobile at the time. We jumped in the car and rushed out to the little town of Ewa. Because to get to the base those days, you had to go through Ewa itself.

And we got out to Ewa, we were strafed on the road. Never hit, but we saw some of the strafing. And when we got to Ewa itself, why, my wife hadn’t driven since she was a girl and I told her, “Get in the car and drive, ‘cause I’m staying here.”

She did that and went back to the [PH] Bento’s, who lived in Ewa. And I stayed on and went to the base immediately, and my job, I was one of the few that knew anything about having machine guns. So I did some putting together. They were still in [PH] Kosmole.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Were you able to assemble machine guns and use them against the Japanese?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yes.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: How extensive was the damage at Ewa?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: We didn’t do much assembling during, because we were under attack at that time. And the damage was quite extensive. Most of the planes were hit on the ground. And Stan Cohen in his great book has a number of photos I gave him of the automobiles that were demolished and so forth there.

Then as an aside, we had one guy, by the name of Lucas, very similar to my name. and Lucas was a German spy. And he had gone out into the cane fields, and put

arrows and lit them to indicate to the Japanese where the base was located, and where it was. It wasn't necessary but they found out about that immediately and they went out and shot him immediately.

And then my wife was told that I as killed and I was a German spy. She knew I was German and she didn't think I was a spy. Anyway, about two days later I was able to go and tell her, 'cause she immediately went to work for the Ewa Hospital.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: This fellow Lucas, I've heard this story back and forth. Was he a marine?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Not an officer, but a private?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: No, I think Lucas was a private first class or something like that.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Who shot him?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I can't remember that, but it was one of the MPs or one of the guys that was there. They drug him back, I can remember that quite vividly.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: They drug him back?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yeah.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: That's an incredible story. After the attack was over, how bad was it for the people at Ewa and what did you have left to fly with and fight with?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I think you had a number of the machine guns that they were able to remove. A guy by the name of Peters was quite a hero. He was "Blackjack Peters." And a guy that had never been very successful in the Marine Corps.

He got a Navy Cross for jumping in one of the back of the planes and firing, and supposedly getting a plane. And Lieutenant Colonel [PH] Larkin was very quick to reorganize everything we did. We immediately went out, and we couldn't build slit

trenches 'cause it was coral. But we immediately started with sandbags and things like that.

We fully expected to be attacked that night. And I always remember we still....

They had started cooking, early in the morning, *rabbit*. And the previous commanding officer had a whole large area where he was raising rabbits 'cause he thought that was a brilliant idea to feed the troops.

And when Colonel [PH] Larkin came there, he thought it was the silliest idea he ever heard. So they were getting rid of rabbits, eating rabbits about four times a week there. And I've never been able to eat rabbit since.

But anyway we say the whole bombardment of night because there was a great deal of anti-aircraft firing going on at Pearl Harbor at that time.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was your personal feeling about this? Were you angry at what had happened?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Extremely angry, yes. Just almost to the point where, I think the [SOUNDS LIKE] eminence was so strong. I mean, even the next day we corralled workers that were Japanese. And while they weren't mistreated, there was certainly a feeling....

I think you can go a step further and the thing we're ashamed of most is probably what we did to the Japanese on the west coast. But those were trying times, and you can understand very vividly how people could react. Similar to World War I when the reaction towards Germans was quite....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can you summarize your activities and what brought you to Midway, and when you came here?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yes. Admiral Nimitz is, from the records as you know came out here and looked over the whole situation very thoroughly. I heard someone saying again this morning, I think it was Bill, how thorough the admiral was, walking around.

You see pictures of him going in the dugout, and if you knew Nimitz, which I was fortunate enough to, here he was in a jacket. Hot as hell. And a tie and everything walking around those stinkin' dugouts looking at everything.

When he came back, he and Colonel [PH] Larkin had been very close friends over the years both being naval aviators.

So he called Colonel [PH] Larkin in and said "Your marine air group is in terrible shape." He said, "They just don't have anybody that knows anything about quarter master supply activities, and there's a poor aviator trying to run the thing. You've got to send somebody out."

And Colonel [PH] Larkin said, "I've got the man, and I'm going to send him out."

He said, "Well who's that?"

And he said, "The guy's named Bill Lucius."

And he said, "What's his rank?"

And he said, "He just made warrant officer."

And Nimitz said, "Oh my God! No, you need a captain out there at least."

And [PH] Larkin said, "No, that's who I wanna send."

So, Nimitz said "I wanna talk to him." So I had to go in and see Nimitz, and he asked me a number of very cutting questions about aviation, aviation supply, and what I do and so forth. And I didn't even have my insignia because everybody had been promoted. And so I looked like a private.

And so he laughed a little bit and said, "Well you go on back. I think Colonel [PH] Larkin's made the right decision. Is there anything I could do for you?"

And I said, "Yes. There certainly is, Admirable. My wife's still here, she's working for the army. And from what you indicated to me about the "pressingness" of this Midway situation, I'd like to get her out of here."

He said "That will be handled."

And so the MPs came down and got my wife at the apartment in Honolulu, and put her on the Luraline, which is not the Luraline we know, but a transport. She, with six other women in a small cabin, went on back to the States.

Then I was put on, I think the name of the ship was called The [PH] Canopus.... But it's hard to say. And myself and Floyd Parks, and a guy by the name of Bill....

I'll have to look that one up. Anyway, the three of us went out on the [PH] Canopus to here, and we went down to Johnson first. Because the Big 7 companies were then doing work on the islands. We went down to Johnson then headed here.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What was your first impression of Midway?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I got off the ship and actually they didn't have any bunks for us. We were sleeping on some makeshift set up. And I was glad to be here. And of course, I knew Colonel [PH] Kimes very well who I was to report to.

He was the commanding officer of the marine aircraft group. And I knew him quite well. So I asked where he was, and was told, and I went over to Easter Island with my gear.

My first welcome was kinda interesting. As I got on this little boat which was going over to Eastern, a guy from the sixth defense battalion hollered at me.

And he said, "Hey, Bill! What the hell are *you* doing here?" And it was a guy I'd served with in China years ago.

So I went on over and reported to Colonel [PH] Kimes, and he told me where I was gonna sleep. And I said, "I want you to go to work immediately. Our supplies are in terrible shape. We don't know what we've got," and so forth.

So I went down to one of the dugouts, very similar to the one you see the picture of Nimitz coming out of.

Because there was very little on Easter Island. The runways were there, the revetments were there. The supply area was sorta half ass, and the mess hall was there, etcetera.

But there just.... It wasn't very well organized. The aviation thing was, I thought.

But certainly your facilities weren't. And so I went right to my bunk that they'd given me, put my stuff down and went over and reported to the supply set up, or the quarter mastery, and started immediately putting things together, seeing what we had, what we needed, and what we could steal from the navy and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You know, I've interviewed several people, but you're the first one that said they were glad to be here. Why were you glad to be here?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I guess that I saw it as a challenge. I saw it as a great chance for a young warrant officer to be a group quartermaster because it never happened before that I could ever remember. They'd all been majors, captains, something like that.

I just thought it was.... I knew a lot of the aviators, they'd been at Ewa, and it was somewhat of a reunion to me, and I had a very great respect for Colonel [PH] Kimes, just a very great respect for him.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Now, after you did your initial inventory and looked over what you had and didn't have, what was the situation here?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Nothing particularly happened except to get things into shape until before the battle when we got the Kitty Hawk came in at that time. And came in with a number of raw aviators, and Major Parks, who was a captain when I came out, was promoted to major. And he and I had been great friends.

I'd already written Colonel [PH] Larkin a personal note with many of the things I thought we needed. And many of those things Colonel [PH] Larkin arranged to get on the Kitty Hawk. He was a very powerful individual.

Very definite. And we got planes on the Kitty Hawk. And to explain the Kitty Hawk a bit, and perhaps others have explained it, it was actually a very large, almost a tin can type of boat. It was, oh, very lengthy.

It had actually been a boat that...railroad cars out of Cuba could be rolled in there and stayed on there, and taken out with fresh fruit and stuff.

And so the railroad ramps were still there, and they sent us out a lot of vehicles and sent us out all these young aviators. And I had a great many of my supplies I'd requested, especially flight jackets and equipment like that were all there.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Very good. That's a good time to cut.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: ...I made mistakes, I don't want you to....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Let's take you back to the point where you set up supply, the Kitty Hawk had come in, the build up was starting. Did you have any indication of the impending battle and if you did, when did that information start to filter through to you?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I think Admiral Nimitz had vaguely indicated to me that I was going out there for a specific purpose. It wasn't just to be a happy supply officer there. And he indicated there was.... [INDISCERNIBLE]

Colonel [PH] Larkin was very *definitely* knowledgeable about it. He was privy to it, and [PH] Larkin and I were very, very close. And even as a young warrant officer, why, he liked me, he knew me, and I liked him.

So perhaps he confided more in me than the normal person would. And especially some of the knowledge....

And then he knew that I knew Charlie Finney, the radar guy they brought out here. So I think he was pretty definite in his allowing me. Looking back now, I think I knew more than I really thought I knew.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: The Kitty Hawk arrived here when, approximately?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Oh, why, I suspect probably, and Bill knows exactly, but I think probably a week or ten days.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Prior to the battle?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yeah. I think somewhere around the 24th, maybe the 25th of May.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: When did you definitely know there was something on?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: When they started to bring the PBY pilots out and the PBY pilots were put in the same dugout I was in to sleep. They talked a great deal, and they obviously were searching. And they, Bob Swan and others indicated they were looking for Japanese fleets. It was evident they knew something. They'd all been trained in recognition of different types of carriers and so forth.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can you summarize and bring us right up to the eve of battle? What was happening with you personally?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I was pretty knowledgeable the attack was going to be forthcoming. And I was...

Colonel [PH] Kimes was very busy, and yet he talked to me on a number of occasions. The army had come in already, the B17s. They reported to me, they needed gasoline. If you remember, the fuel pumps or fuel had been blown up. We had a number of wobble pumps which I was issuing out. And I always remember a Major by the name of Sweeney came in, and he told me that his planes needed gassing up.

And I said, "Well here's the pumps, get busy and gas them up."

And many of the B17 guys that came out had no clothes. They had just what they put on. And I was able to give them a lot of things that they [INDISCERNIBLE] ...things like that.

They all arrived and I got to know some of them quite well. But on the morning of the attack, I was up very early. And I went over to my supply area which I thought

would be the logical place to be. And I'd read some accounts of the very great success in Europe of the use of slit trenches. And how they were very safe. And so I'd already dug a slit trench for myself with sand bags around the top.

And Bill Staff, I forgot his name a while ago, was a marine gunner and the ordinance chief. And Bill also had a slit trench next to me. And Major Benson also was a good friend of mine, because he'd been the quartermaster of the second defense battalion when I arrived with the reserves back in October.

And he'd asked me to stay with the second defense battalion, and he was not able to accomplish that. So Benson and I had talked a good deal before the battle. So the morning of the battle, he said to me, "Bill, I have the best dugout on the island. There's no doubt about the command post. It's probably the safest. Why don't you come in and stay with me?"

And I said, "Major, let me tell your, I was so scared at Pearl Harbor when I was running, I didn't see the Japanese too well. I want to see them now, and so I'm gonna stay right here in this slit trench," which I did.

And when the first wave came over of course, the bomb was a direct hit. And his dugout, which was probably 50 to 75 feet from me. And I immediately got out of my slit trench and ran over there, and he was dead. So there was no doubt about that.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Can we backtrack a little? Can you tell me how the day of battle was, what time you got up, and what some of your thoughts were prior to the battle? Then from there, describe the battle?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Sure. Well, actually I was up very early. 'Cause I went by the command post, which they're working....

A guy by the name of Captain Burns who later became a colonel, Burns [SOUNDS LIKE] would call, who was subsequently a lieutenant general, they all knew me quite well.

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And we talked a little bit about what would be needed and so forth. And I already outfitted most of the aviators on their gear. And these guys really were just fresh, some of them. [INDISCERNIBLE]

Never been in planes before, no training. So I went on over to my area. I think I probably went by and had a light breakfast, and just got over to the area itself. As I say, talked to Benson, and etcetera.

Vaguely in my mind is.... Charlie Finney said they'd already alerted or picked up some radar but I'm not that clear on that.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: After the command post was blown up, can you describe the rest of the battle as you saw it?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well it was not only the command post, but all the rest of the area was hit. As a matter of fact the exchange was hit. Walter Lord in his book covered it well, he said, "It's the only time in my life I could have been drinking beer, smoking cigars and eating candy bars at the same time," because they were all flying in the air.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Talking about objects flying around, I understand you had a near thing with some knives, forks, and spoons?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: That's correct too, quite a lot of the galley equipment was flying around. I was glad about my slit trench, both Bill Staff and I were grazed with the stuff flying around. And I'd like to digress just a moment to give tribute to Bill Staff. Bill Staff was a very unusual guy, a though marine who'd been in...shortly after World War I, and when the B17s came out, of course they didn't have any bombs with them.

So they needed bombs. And our bombs had the brackets on them so they could be dropped from the planes. And Colonel [PH] Kimes was quite worried about that.

So were the air force guys. And Bill Staff said “Hell that’s no problem!” He went and got a hacksaw, started working on the bombs and cut around them with a hacksaw. Then he’d stand back with a sledgehammer and knock those [SOUNDS LIKE] lunks of there. I thought Bill was a very brave man. I wasn’t gonna do it, I’ll tell you that much.

Bill and I became great friends over the years and he’s long since dead.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: This battle that took place, it was quite ferocious for a short time period. Can you kind of describe to a person that has never witnessed battle what the sight and sounds must’ve been like here on Midway?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well when you get 108 per....Bill can correct me on that but I think I’m right. And they come in and they’re diving at low level on the runways and so forth, why there’s an awful lot of noise. The power plant blew up. And actually it’s, well....

There were no atheists there, let me say it that way.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Were you.... Would it be fair to say you were apprehensive, frightened, scared? What word would you use?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Oh, I was seeing such an amount, naturally I thought we were very doubtful as to whether we would be able to do that.

Because it was pretty obvious they were gonna have landing troops that were coming in. And I said to Bill and a number of other people “There’s no doubt in my mind they’re gonna make the landing that they didn’t make at Pearl.”

And sure I was scared. I was walking around with a fist at all times, and was prepared to....

And I’d also had the privilege of watching the extensive activity of the mining of the beaches. The barb wire.... I talked to the radar guys. The tanks were there, I didn’t

even remember them. So I had a great deal of confidence that perhaps we could withhold.

And that was early in the war, before the big assaults, and we really didn't realize that much about it.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You were very close to the Marine Aviation wing, and it's been said by some historians that one of the stories that's often overlooked or not even told is the contribution that the Marine Aviation wing made here. Could you elaborate on that story so it's not lost to history?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yes, I would be very pleased to. I knew each one of the commanders, I knew when they went out, I knew when they came back, I knew who was lost. Parks was particularly close to me...who went out on the ship, Ben Norris, Leon Williams, a lot of those guys. Danny Iverson, who came back after the attack with his plane completely riddled with 250-some bullets with his throat shot off, and Ensign Gaye who came back and was dumped off at Midway when he was picked up subsequently.

Yes, I had a very good insight. And perhaps the greatest insight I had was the fact that, to be repetitious, I was the quartermaster. And it was my job to inventory the effects of each one of those guys.... Very distressing, because I had to read every letter they had, some that were very prying.

Because in those days there were also very careful about secrecy of this thing. I had to pack their clothes along with a couple sergeants I had and take an inventory, then destroy anything that might be mentioned in the letters with reference to what was of a "security nature."

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Must have been fairly.... A sense of sadness coming over, since you knew these men? And....

WILLIAM LUCIUS: It was, because they had come up, one guy was from the University of Idaho and had been an All-American football player. You have to understand the status of a warrant officer in those days. He was a very important person. And actually, he very rarely talked to a second lieutenant because he thought they were underneath him.

I had the privilege of knowing these guys coming over and asking me for stuff, and they were surprised as hell I gave it to them.

I had plotting boards, and they didn't have any plotting boards. They were just great guys that liked me. And as I say, I had the confidence of Colonel [PH] Kimes and many others. Then when I heard that Parks and Norris went out and was gone, it was very trying.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: In some of the readings I've run across, I'd like you to comment about this, some marines were very disgusted these aviators had to go out with equipment that wasn't up to snuff. In particular, the [SOUNDS LIKE] Brewster Buffalo was a poor excuse for an airplane to catch up against the Zero. How do you feel about that?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I can only sum this up. This is great, and I, let me see what I got....

This is a drawing that was done, and I don't think there are many in existence, by a hospital corpsman by the name of [PH] Dettling.

And this is a picture that was actually taken back to the president of the United States. And it shows a picture first of a flying fortress, and he says: "Hey marine: you go ahead and engage the enemy. We'll only be about 1,000 miles behind you."

And this is a flying fortress. And here's the PT navy boat, and he says, "Yeah you go ahead and start shooting the Japs, then we'll pick up the survivors." Then there's a small marine plane here with patches all over it and the engine is having trouble,

then the gooney bird is over here on the left, and I'll pass this to all of you to see, and it says, "Say, Doc, where did you get that flying fortress?" Then over on the left is: "Liberty, equality and supplies for all, except the flying leathernecks." And I think that's a great piece.

And that was taken back to Colonel [PH] Larkin, and Colonel [PH] Larkin got in touch with Jimmy Roosevelt, and Jimmy Roosevelt took this back to his father. And that's when marine aviation started to get the equipment that was so definitely needed.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: So perhaps an effect of the Battle of Midway was the realization that the Marine Aviation needed to brought up to the standards of the enemy they were fighting?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Oh, no question. And no disrespect to the navy, but the marines, up to World War...this time, they didn't get any new equipment. It had been used.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: They were the "poor stepchild."

WILLIAM LUCIUS: That's absolutely correct.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You've had a long time to think about the Battle of Midway. You've....

[SURFACE NOISE]

WILLIAM LUCIUS: That's one of the planes now. Well, I'm very photogenic....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [LAUGHS] Bill, you've had a lot of time to think about all this I'm sure. And you've been mentioned in books, and asked for your summary. But is there any angle on Midway that you've thought about that maybe hasn't been shared? Or something you feel strongly about when you think of the Battle of Midway?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I first of all feel very strongly at the wonderful thing that you people are doing. I was at Pearl Harbor and one of the few Midway survivors that was at Pearl Harbor. At the big to-do of Pearl Harbor, our largest single defeat

against this our greatest label “victory.” I think it’s been too long to recognize, and even in our papers in the States, you saw very little about the Battle of Midway.

And in history books you read about Pearl Harbor, even kids in school learn about it but they don’t learn about Midway. And if there’s any gratitude I can show whatsoever, it would be the fact that this is happening. And I hope it will become a momentous part of history to show. Because this is the greatest naval battle that was ever held.

And it’s the turning point of the war. We would have had no Guadalcanal probably. We would certainly have had Yamamoto take over the Hawaiian Islands. And you’re all familiar with the submarines on the coast that popped up and shot.

I just think...I’m very privileged I was a part of it. I often say, and I was all the way to the surrender in China in the end of the war. And nothing is so significant to me as the Battle of Midway.

And I was brought out here for a specific purpose. General [PH] Larkin, he was then a full colonel by that time, took me back to Ewa. I only stayed here until early in September. I became the youngest wing quartermaster that the marine aviation has ever had as second lieutenant.

And I just had a great career, and a lot of it was being at the right place at the right time. I didn’t want to go to Pearl Harbor, I wasn’t enthused about it. I said was happy to be here for my friends, but I’m not too sure I would have volunteered for it. So I just think my whole career has been one that has been very gratifying, and my political career has been very gratifying. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen the background on me on political setup, but....

DANIEL MARTINEZ: We might discuss that. But the one thing I would like to discuss is you’re here now at Midway. What’s it like coming back?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: There are both pros and cons. I haven't been to Easter and I don't know any part of that. My God, when I look at this paradise here, and what I see, I mentioned to Cecil the other day and several of you that we should sell this to somebody and put a huge hotel here, and have it like Saipan, be a honeymoon paradise! Very few trees when I was here, originally.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Are you disappointed in what you see?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: No, I'm not. Maybe it has no logistical value, but I said to Bill the other day that, you know, I see this deterioration here and you wonder, you know. I went through a number of lowering of our armed services. And I wonder whether we're looking forward to that again. It worries me greatly. I saw a marine corps of 12,000 when I came in. I saw it go up to 480,000. Then I saw it, after the war, deteriorate, and then we, fortunately get legislation which said there will always be 3 marine air wings and 3 marine divisions, but it didn't say how big.

The common end is accepting 156,000 as the low point in the marine corps. I just don't know.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Many of the veterans that I've spoken with think this was a crossroads in their life. Was it a crossroads for you?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yes I guess it was. I guess it was. I was recommended for a decoration here. I didn't get it. And I was somewhat chagrined. I went back to Pearl, and Admiral Nimitz and Secretary Forrestal thought I had done quite a bit, and they informed the president of the United States that I had.

And I went back and Colonel [PH] Larkin called me and said I was being promoted to second lieutenant. And I said, "Hell! I don't wanna be a second lieutenant, I'm an important warrant officer. I lose sixty seven dollars and fifty cents a month!"

And he said, "Look you dumb son of a gun, I was a corporal in World War I and I'm gonna be a general." And I said, "Whatever you say, Sheriff."

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And so 30 days later, I received a dispatch, which is rather unique in its own right, which said, “Promote second lieutenant William R. Lucius to first lieutenant immediately. No physical examination required.” And the signature was Roosevelt’s.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: By order of the president.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: It was signed by him. Then six months later I was a captain. So I didn’t do too bad. So this was, if you wanna put it that way Danny, a turning point in my life.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: A crossroad.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Yup.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: I think you’ve explained to me what Midway meant in a professional experience. What about in a personal experience, dealing with all of these losses of friends?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: It was tragic. Most of the guys were single. Parks was married. I ran across many of the wives subsequently, and, you know—

DANIEL MARTINEZ: What do you say to a wife?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: It’s awfully hard. Certainly, I knew Dick Fleming, God almighty, brave beyond belief! And I’m going to talk to Mike’s dad about him, but to see these guys and then never see them again is difficult.

[PH] Zack Tyler, only by the fact that his plane didn’t start was he back here. Danny Iverson. One guy I can’t even remember his name never wanted to fly again. He’d been saved. And I can’t recall his name, but he served with me subsequently in the Solomons.

And they sorta called him a coward because he just had lost all his morale.

And he just didn’t want to fly again.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Did you understand that?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: I did to a degree. Conversely, we had a captain who was one of the captains here on the sixth defense battalion who subsequently became a flyer and was with me later on—when to Pensacola.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Bill, where do we get these kinds of individuals in America? The ones that do these brave things?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, that's a hard question to say. Whether we have the leadership today that we had then, certainly Schwarzkopf is an example of brave leadership. But these guys went out against all odds. And the poorest of equipment and everything else. But I think the commandant would like me to say this: they were marines.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Why'd you come back to Midway? Okay. What do you want him to say again?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, I wanted to come. I'd been quite close to [PH] Robbie, I've talked to Bill, and I just thought it'd be a wonderful thing. Five years ago, the Royal Viking line asked me to be a lecturer on the return to Guadalcanal, to the Coral Sea, to Guam and so forth. And I was treated great there. And the most important thing to me would be to go back to Midway. I was in Guadalcanal and made the landings, I was in the Solomons, and the Philippines and I just felt this was probably the most important factor.

In about two weeks, I'd written to Mike and Mike said "Hell yes! Come." And I was pleased, it was all arranged, about three weeks ago...and this week my wife fell down, and had a rather serious accident. And my thought was, "Maybe I shouldn't go." Then my daughter, granddaughter and son-in-law live within 3 miles and said "You're gonna go, come hell or high water," then when I heard you were here I wanted to come anyway. [LAUGHS]

DANIEL MARTINEZ: [LAUGHS] I had asked you a question earlier. We wanted to make sure we got it on tape. Where did we get these men to fight so bravely? And your answer was something about, “they were marines.” Can you just paraphrase it? We’ll have to reconstruct it.

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Well, as I said, I think they went out against all odds. And certainly, lack of equipment, and everything else. And they were marines. And that sums it all up as I said. The commandant would like me to say that, but I mean it from my heart.

After I got out of the Marine Corps, I was in sales for a number of years. And you know, if ever I had a guy I had to sell, if he was a marine, I had him sold. Because there’s that bonding in Marine Corps that no other organization has.

And we’re, next Tuesday, gonna celebrate the 217th anniversary of the Marine Corps, and I have a message from the commandant and will be very happy to read it at that time.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: You know, you’re very proud of your service, and rightfully so. When you see that symbol of marines, or hear United States Marine Corps echoed in a speech or film, how do you feel inside?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: There’s a certain pride. In my little county of Sonoma, we have, every year, about 150 of us get together for lunch. We have a number of balls, I’m missing all those, and we just have a great affair.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Bill, in your estimation of a long and distinguished career, what makes a marine?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: That’s awfully hard to say. You see guys that were not very strong, you know. They’re dropouts from school or things like that. But when the crisis occurs, there’s something about the corps itself that they usually measure up

to the standard that's been set. And I think that's true. I think the comment, "Once a marine always a marine" is most self-evident.

DANIEL MARTINEZ: Was it evident here at Midway?

WILLIAM LUCIUS: Oh, very much so. Because most of the officers, you know, I probably, [PH] Scotty Frazier, a few others, but...Bill's more versatile than I....

But most of the officers in those days, that were senior at all, were World War I guys.

And it's just not... But they rose to the occasion!

God, here's guys out of the University of Idaho coming out here as a young second lieutenant. And God, he's almost sure he's gonna be killed, and yet he went and did it.

[END AUDIO]